

HENNEPIN ~ PRIEST, EXPLORER AND ROMANCER

THE Monk of St. Francis, Who in Gray Gown and Sandals and with Portable Altar Strapped on His Back Wandered Through the Trackless Wilderness of New France and Became the Historian of La Salle

BY RICHARD SPILLANE.

Louis Hennepin was not the saintly man Pere Marquette was, and he did not have so much religious ardor as some other soldiers of the Cross, but he was a noble figure nevertheless. He carried his portable altar on his back through the trackless wilderness of New France, finding a bed at times in the snow or in the tangled woods or on the boundless prairie. He had the wanderlust and had to keep moving. Bold, hardy, brave, he ventured much and endured much. No task was too hard for him, no peril appalled him. He had no pride, no ambition, no glory for him unless the praises of men be counted as such. As a Franciscan monk he had taken the vows of poverty and he was content with his possessions—a pair of sandals, a coarse gray gown held by the cord of St. Francis, a crucifix and a rosary.

Strange that such a man should be an egotist. Hennepin was excessively vain and boastful. He wrote much of his travels, and the more he wrote the more he gave play to his imagination. The facts were big enough to make him a world figure, yet he exaggerated.

He simply could not help it. His self-love was so strong and his confidence in his own vision and his judgment were warped. He minimized the doings of others and magnified those of himself. He got too, to believe his own exaggerations. It was not mendacity. It simply was egotism in a most distorted form. Too bad that his good name is tarnished by the excesses of statement his love of applause led him to indulge in, for he was a great man and a good man.

Meets La Salle. He was a Belgian and was born in 1610. Soon after he was admitted to the priesthood he was sent to Dunkirk and Calais to solicit alms. As he wandered about these cities he found his imagination was fired by the stories he heard the sailors tell of their adventures in the wonderful New World. The more stories he heard the more his passion for travel grew. He wanted to cross the sea, but he could not get permission, so he wandered over France and Germany and Italy. For a time he was chaplain of a regiment and took part in the battle of Senef, when the armies of Condé and the Prince of Orange came together.

He was not until he was thirty-five years old that his mindings to be sent to America were answered. The ship that brought him across the Atlantic had one other passenger destined to win fame in the New World—René Robert Cavalier, better known as La Salle. The names of the two were destined to be linked in the grand story of exploring the American continent, but they were as opposite in temperament as men could be. La Salle, who was thirty-two, was grave, reserved and unbending. Hennepin was vain, volatile and whimsical. There was no love lost between the two. La Salle, who was a stoic, had something of a preaching contempt for the monk, while Hennepin bitterly resented the

calm air of superiority with which the younger man considered him.

In Quebec the two separated. Hennepin to roam about Canada and La Salle to establish his seignior at La Chine, where he soon was to plan for his expedition in search of a western passage to the Indies. Up and down the St. Lawrence went Hennepin. At times he wandered far to the North and at other times far to the South. One winter he crossed Lake Ontario on the ice and visited the settlements of the Oneidas and the Mohawks. He was a linguist of rare ability and much given to study. Eager to master the various Indian dialects, he gave deep attention to their speech. Among other things he did while with the Mohawks was to copy and add to a Mohawk dictionary prepared by a Jesuit father.

This winter trip had amazed the Indians, who marveled at the hardihood of the monk, traversing the forests and sleeping in the snow at a time when men were loath to leave the comforts of cabins or wigwams. But Hennepin did it with a purpose. He had the days of winter when the Indians gave little thought to war or the chase, was the best time to study them and their language and, besides, he wanted to harden himself for the winters in the West, for he already had ideas of pushing further into the wilderness.

The Expedition. The monk had been in Canada three years when his imagination was stirred again by the report of an expedition La Salle had in view. The Lord of La Chine had made one voyage of exploration. He had gone down the Beautiful River (the Ohio) to the falls (Louisville) and knew from the Indians that it emptied into the Mississippi. He was eager to explore the Mississippi. Whether it emptied into the Pacific or the Gulf of Mexico he was not sure, but he inclined to the Pacific idea. He knew from report that the Illinois, too, emptied into the Mississippi. He determined to follow the Mississippi to its mouth, claim the territory for Louis XIV., and not only plant the banner of France at its mouth, but establish settlements and forts at the strategic points along the route. La Salle was not an idle dreamer. He planned his work on a generous scale.

It would not be sufficient to travel by canoe and endure. He should traverse the Great Lakes by ship and he should traverse the Mississippi by ship. Of course the Falls of Niagara made it impossible for a ship from the St. Lawrence to enter Lake Erie. He determined therefore to build a ship beyond the falls for use in the Great Lakes. This ship would carry the men and material for the building of a ship at some point on the Illinois to sail down the Mississippi.

To transport the material from Lake Michigan to a suitable point on the Illinois would be a herculean job, but La Salle was a man of indomitable will. Greater, however, than the nature of the task he would have to overcome were those his enemies were to create for him. His patron, Count Frontenac, Governor of Canada, had earned the enmity of the Jesuits. La Salle, too, although a good churchman, was opposed to the Jesuits. The Jesuits saw in La Salle's scheme something threatening their supremacy. They were more interested in the saving of souls than in the extension of trade.

The Griffon. While La Salle was not supposed to engage in trade, it was inevitable his ship, the Griffon, would be a commercial venture. Merchants of Montreal and Quebec, who looked upon this as an invasion of the rich fur field they controlled, were openly antagonistic. The coureurs de bois, too, those hardy, half-savage rangers of the wilds, wanted no poaching on their preserves. And in New York, where the Dutch and English were living, it was realized that success to La Salle meant extension of the fur trade of the French and construction of the fur trade of the English and Dutch. All the elements opposed to La Salle could strike at him through the Indians, and some of them could strike at him through the King of France himself.

It was late in the fall of 1673 that Hennepin joined La Salle at Fort Frontenac (Kingston), and sailed from there in a little ten-ton boat with Henri de Tonty and a party of men for the Niagara River, where it was proposed to build a fort. At a point on Cayuga Creek, some miles beyond the falls, it was decided to build the ship for service on the lakes. But there was trouble from the start. The Indians not only objected to the fort, but threatened to burn the ship if one was built. To add to the misfortune, a supply vessel with La Salle on board, which followed that in which Hennepin had left Fort Frontenac, was wrecked thirty miles from Niagara. La Salle, however, was not to be stopped. Trees were felled and the shipbuilders were set to work. The winter was bitterly cold and the food was scant. The only shelter the men had was in the open bark. La Salle had to go back for fresh supplies, and the men labored on through the winter. On Sundays and saints' days Hennepin, who had built a little chapel out of bark and placed his portable altar in it, said mass. At night sentinels stood watch about the shipyard to guard against Indians.

In the spring the brig, which was of sixty tons, was launched to the accompaniment of Te Deums, the shouts of the French, the yells of the Indians and the reports of the little cannon and the reports of the little cannon.



wolves were after him already. He has spent large sums of money in order to find it out his expedition, and was finding it difficult to raise more funds to replace the supplies lost in the wreck. Not until August did he arrive. Meanwhile the brig had been taken up the river to Black Rock and anchored close to shore. So close to the land was it that Hennepin said mass on the deck and preached from there to the men standing on the shore.

On the Lake. On August 7 the Griffon entered Lake Erie, where sail never had been seen before. For three days the bark went gaily along its canvas bellying to the breeze, and then on the fourth day the ship entered the Strait of Detroit and passed on into Lake Huron. So far all was pleasant, but soon a storm arose that threatened to engulf the brig. All on board said their prayers, except the pilot. He swore. He was a godless creature, and all he could think of was the shame of going to death in an unsalted sea after all the years he had passed on the boisterous Atlantic. The pilot was not to have this undignified ending, however, for the storm abated and the bark arrived in safety at Michilimackinac (Mackinaw).

Although the arrival of the Griffon was greeted with salutes, Michilimackinac really was a hostile camp. It was a Jesuit centre, and here the lawless coureurs de bois had their rendezvous. La Salle soon learned that the Indians had been warned that he was their enemy, and he also discovered that most of the nearly two dozen men he had sent ahead to the Illinois country to trade for him and prepare for the arrival of the expedition had been tampered with by the traders and Jesuits.

Some had squandered the goods entrusted to them or used them for their own account, and others had absconded. He sent Tonty to arrest some of them who had taken refuge at the falls of St. Marie, and then, gathering up such furs as he could, he sent the Griffon back with the cargo in order to appease his creditors.

In canoe La Salle, Hennepin and twelve others skirted the shore of Lake Michigan, bound for the mouth of the St. Joseph River, where they were to meet them. The weather was tempestuous and they had a desperate time of it. When they reached the river Tonty had not arrived. The men were mutinous, but La Salle and Hennepin held them in check, and at last when, in December, Tonty arrived the little party proceeded up the St. Joseph to the present site of South Bend, where they shouldered their canoes and marched overland in search of the headwaters of the Illinois.

Finding the Illinois. After wandering about a long time they found a spot where a tiny stream trickled out of the oozy soil. Into this thread of water they put their canoes and followed its course. It was like sailing on land, but gradually the stream widened, and early in the new year they reached Peoria Lake, and then made their way downward to the present site of Peoria. Near this spot they came suddenly upon a large Indian encampment. Getting sight of the Frenchmen, the Indians became panic-stricken. Some fled, others howled, and a few raised war clubs. La Salle knew how to handle Indians, and putting on a bold front, he led his little party ashore and drew his force up ready for battle or for peace.

Two of the chiefs came forward with the calumet, while others sought to restrain the young bucks, who were preparing to use their bows and arrows. La Salle displayed another calumet and presented some tobacco and hatchets to the two envoys and explained his presence in the country and his purpose to build a great ship to sail the Mississippi. If the Illinois Indians wanted his party, he would let them, he said. If not, he would go to the Osages and leave the Illinois to the mercy of the terrible

Iroquois.

The Illinois were very jealous of the Osages, as La Salle knew, and were lavish in promises of loyalty to him. In the night, however, there came a change. From the North there came a party of six Indians sent by the French at the Mackinaw station to the Illinois against La Salle. Next day the chiefs of the Illinois frightened six of the explorer's force into deserting by reason of the tales they told of the savage tribes that infested the Mississippi country, the monsters that lived along the shore, the serpents that abounded in the waters, the number of whirlpools and the fathomless gulf into which the mighty stream emptied its waters. Next an attempt was made to poison La Salle.

Manifestly it would not do to remain in the Indian camp, so La Salle moved a few miles down the river, and on a promontory established Fort Crevecoeur. He had heard nothing of the Griffon and was in some perplexity. He could not go forward, for his force was reduced to only a dozen or so of men. He did not have carpenters enough to build a ship, and his supplies were exhausted. He learned what had become of the Griffon and to get reinforcements and supplies he started back to Mackinaw. And in order that Hennepin might enjoy himself in his absence, La Salle instructed him to explore the Illinois to its mouth and then to go up the Mississippi and explore it to its headwaters.

La Salle departed only to learn that the Griffon had been traitorously sunk or burned, and Hennepin started out on a voyage that was to lead him into strange adventures.

It was on February 25, 1680, that Hennepin, with two companions, Michel Accau and Picard Du Guy, set out in a canoe from Fort Crevecoeur. They had a stock of beads, tobacco, knives and trifles to give the Indians they encountered, but they had no embarrassing experiences until long after they left the Illinois and had paddled far up the Mississippi. Each day Hennepin said prayers at morning and night and the Angels at noon, and each Sunday he said mass for his two companions. He carried his little altar with him. One day, when the

Nineteen days after the capture the Indians arrived at what is now St. Paul. Here the war party was to divide, as it was made up of various tribes scattered throughout Northern Minnesota. Again the disposition of the three Frenchmen was debated. Hennepin was allotted to the old chief, who liked for the monk's scalp. Accau was given to another tribe and Du Guy to still another. Hennepin had employed his time studying the Sioux language, and soon was sure for with the old chief that the old man decided to adopt him as his son.

Although it was May when the war party dispersed, the marshes and ponds were glazed with ice. Hennepin, who was half-starved and nearly exhausted, had difficulty in keeping his feet with the Indians. His feet were torn by the ice streams he had to swim. When he lagged in crossing a prairie the Indians delighted in setting fire to the grass and then, taking hold of his hands,

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three voyagers were on shore and Hennepin was repairing the canoe, a war party of 120 Sioux came down the river and captured them. The Sioux were in search of the Illinois, who had killed some Sioux warriors, and when they learned from Hennepin that the Illinois were far down the river and safe from pursuit they were bitter in their lamentations.

To soften their sorrow at losing the Illinois many of them thought the proper thing to do was to massacre Hennepin and his companions. They held council and so decided. Presently one of the chiefs signified to Hennepin that his head was to be split with a war club. Knowing of nothing better to do Hennepin gathered a lot of the trinkets in the canoe, cast the stuff into the circle of warriors and then bowed his head in readiness for death. His gifts and his attitude of submission won favor with one of the chiefs, and this man insisted that the Frenchman should not be killed. For a long time the chiefs debated as to the disposition of the captives, but the merciful chief finally prevailed. The war party re-embarked in their canoe and, taking Hennepin and the other two with them, proceeded up the Mississippi.

Each night the Indians camped ashore and each night the scalp of the Frenchmen were in peril, as some of the Sioux were bent on killing them. For safety Hennepin and his companions slept alongside the friendly chief. In the morning when Hennepin opened his eyes he found the chief and the Indians had begun his morning devotions. They thought he was invoking bad spirits and he had to cease. One old chief, whose son had been killed by the Illinois, was particularly anxious to have Hennepin's scalp to soothe his aching heart, and this old fellow would hang around the monk and feel his head and utter loud lamentations.

Captives. Hennepin had told the story of a party of "spirits" coming to the Wisconsin so often that he had come to believe it himself. He and Du Guy, however, were not to be so easily won over by them in the canoe, and they floated down the Mississippi to the Falls of St. Anthony, which Hennepin called the Falls of the Spirit. Around the Falls of St. Anthony they carried their canoe and then they paddled 150 miles down the great river. Their chief food was turtles. Once while they were ashore their canoe got loose and went dancing down stream. Hennepin, who was a good swimmer, recovered it after a long chase. They had so little ammunition that they had to be wary about changing a shot, but they killed one buffalo. Then they ate so ravenously that they became desperately ill. While they were ill the rest of the buffalo meat spoiled in the hot sun. Thereafter they subsisted on turtle or fish dropped by eagles or fishawks. Where the Mississippi enters Lake Pepin, Hennepin and Du Guy came upon the Sioux hunters again. The hunters had found plenty of buffalo and were faring well. They remained with the hunters until one day the party was thrown into great excitement by the receipt of news that a war party of Sioux bound for Lake Superior had encountered five "spirits."

making him race to keep out of the flames. Five days of this sort of travel he had and then he reached the village of the chief. Here he had the pleasure of discovering that he had seven new mothers, for the old chief had seven wives. He was scandalized, too, to see the brocade from his priestly vestments used by one of his foster-brothers to wrap up the bones of a Sioux warrior.

Hennepin tried to do some missionary work among the Sioux, but he could not make any headway. He did, however, make progress in mastering the Sioux vocabulary. The various uses of his vestments preyed upon Hennepin's mind and he complained to the friendly chief, who had conceived a high regard for the monk, and who hated Hennepin's adopted father, not only for this but for stealing the few things that were left of the cargo of Hennepin's canoe. This led to hard times for Hennepin. The hunting season was on, and the old chief wanted Hennepin to go with him on the chase. Hennepin was reluctant as he believed the chief was less eager for his companionship than for a good opportunity to scalp him.

He escaped from the hunting trip. Hennepin gave out the story that he expected a party of "spirits" as the Indians called the French, to be at the mouth of the Wisconsin. He traded with the Sioux and took Hennepin and the two other men back. The Indians believed him, but insisted on his joining them. They went to the Mississippi, but the game was scarce and the party had little to eat. Hennepin and Du Guy were permitted to leave, but they were to be accompanied by them, and Accau had the privilege of accompanying them, but he had begun to like the Indian life and preferred to remain.

The "Spirits." Hennepin had told the story of a party of "spirits" coming to the Wisconsin so often that he had come to believe it himself. He and Du Guy, however, were not to be so easily won over by them in the canoe, and they floated down the Mississippi to the Falls of St. Anthony, which Hennepin called the Falls of the Spirit. Around the Falls of St. Anthony they carried their canoe and then they paddled 150 miles down the great river. Their chief food was turtles. Once while they were ashore their canoe got loose and went dancing down stream. Hennepin, who was a good swimmer, recovered it after a long chase. They had so little ammunition that they had to be wary about changing a shot, but they killed one buffalo. Then they ate so ravenously that they became desperately ill. While they were ill the rest of the buffalo meat spoiled in the hot sun. Thereafter they subsisted on turtle or fish dropped by eagles or fishawks. Where the Mississippi enters Lake Pepin, Hennepin and Du Guy came upon the Sioux hunters again. The hunters had found plenty of buffalo and were faring well. They remained with the hunters until one day the party was thrown into great excitement by the receipt of news that a war party of Sioux bound for Lake Superior had encountered five "spirits."

The hunt was abandoned at once and the whole party, Hennepin, Du Guy and Accau, included, hurried northward. Near the Falls of St. Anthony they met the five Europeans, who were Day, Lhut and four well-armed Frenchmen.

Du Lhut was leader of the coureurs de bois and a cousin of Tonty. He had been at the head of Lake Superior when in some way he had hurried northward. Near the Falls of St. Anthony they met the five Europeans, who were Day, Lhut and four well-armed Frenchmen.

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If Hennepin's tale ended there all would be well. Unfortunately, it does not. He was the historian of La Salle so far as the expedition to Peoria embraces the life of the great explorer. The story is told that Count Frontenac, who he had met, told him to him for much in that connection.

A great deal of valuable information has been picked out, too, from his report of the journey up the Mississippi and his life among the Sioux, but when he went to Europe, soon after leaving Count Frontenac, and found so many persons eager to hear him talk of his adventures and read what he wrote about his travels, he was carried away by his own importance. The more he talked and the more he wrote, and he was lively in each of these fields, the more he credited himself with something and doing.

Something he got to believe that he went down the Mississippi as well as up it, and a few years after his arrival in Europe he published a second account of how he had journeyed down to the mouth of the Father of Waters and explored it before La Salle. It is plain that he had not read the diary of Father Membre and got much of the detail from this, but he put it forth as his own, and vehemently upheld it as correct. No wonder, for his time wrote more or was read more widely. More than twenty editions of his travels were printed in French, English, German, Italian and Spanish. In Europe he put aside his religious dress and gave himself up to writing. When the French challenged his statements he defended them. In all his work there he appears in a poor light. Better by far does he appear as he should be considered, the humble soldier of the Cross, with a pair of sandals, a coarse gray gown held by the cord of St. Francis, a crucifix and a rosary, and with his portable altar strapped to his back, picking his way through the trackless wilderness, intent only on the salvation of souls. (Copyright, 1910, by Richard Spillane.)

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